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Between the State and the NGO's: partnership, protagonism and financing

By Isabel Baptista
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Introduction

The present paper has been prepared as the first of a set of national contributions to be presented to the European Observatory on Homelessness, in the context of the recently introduced Thematic Research working groups methodology.

Portugal is one of the five countries in the working group specifically dealing with “Services for homeless people in Portugal” and the first year’s priority of the working group is the issue of regulation and funding.

No specific studies have been produced on the reality of service provision for homeless people in Portugal and thus the information to be presented is mainly based on direct contacts with the institutions working with the homeless and also on some available data concerning the provision of social services, among which one can find most of the existing services for the homeless.

The specific issue of regulation and funding will be dealt with based on the very little information available and on the direct contribution given by several organisations providing services for the homeless in the two major metropolitan areas.

Public responsibility and the role of NGO's

In Portugal the role of non-profit making organisations in the provision of social protection to citizens has to be understood within a context of structural and persistent levels of poverty and of a late and slow development of the Welfare State. Only after the 1974 Revolution was it possible to juridically and institutionally acknowledge a system of social security. However, a true consolidation of the Welfare State has never occurred in the sense that it has never ensured neither the necessary levels of social protection, nor the adequate coverage of needs. Some authors stress the role of the so-called “welfare-society” (Sousa Santos e Hespanha: 1987) in preventing serious breakdowns in the social tissue. The informal economy, the strength of family ties and the pluri-activity and pluri-income of families played a crucial preventive role.

"The field of the social assistance policy has mainly been placed on the welfare-society scope of action, both through NGO's with whom it deals in the first place, and also by the nature of its activities which are placed side by side with the remaining social policies. Very often they even end up by superposing each other by the incentive of family bonds and interrelationships." (Rodrigues, 1999: 146)

The role of the NGO’s in the provision of social services has thus been decisive in this relationship between the State and the civil society. In this matter the Portuguese
experience is not a recent one. There is a long tradition of relationship between the State and private institutions working in the field of social action, which has been characterised by different forms of recognition, regulation and funding. This process has undergone important changes over the years and once again the political shift brought about by the Revolution was decisive.

Traditionally, there has been a strong influence of the role of charitable institutions in the provision of services for the poorest among the poor. The so-called *misericórdias* date back to the XVI century and although their importance is very heterogenous they have played an important role in the field of social intervention. As an example, only in the field of homelessness, the *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa* (the major social action service provider in the city) is responsible for the provision of a wide range of services: temporary accommodation, outreach teams, professional training, occupational activities, medical support (namely psychiatric), food and other basic needs, psychological and social support. It must be stressed, however, that *Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa* has a specific status within the usual range of organisations working in the field of social action. It is financed through the State overall budget, although a large part of its financing comes from the lottery, which is its most important fund-raising activity.

Among the NGO’s working in the field of social solidarity there is roughly two major groups: those older institutions closely linked to the catholic church and a younger group of institutions that have emerged after 1974 and which have been growing considerably over the years.

New dynamics have been observed (Capucha, coord., 1995) in the two decades following the Revolution: “The initiatives linked to the church have gained a new character and those from an associative or entrepreneurial background have practically emerged since then. The Church, non-confessional associations and private enterprises seem to be the three sources of social initiative presenting an extremely significant dynamism; they seem to have become the State’s partners, on whose intervention one should be counting on in a very important way in the coming years.” (Capucha, ibidem: 9)

Social solidarity organisations have the right to develop, replace or complement state action in the domain of social action, by developing activities which are regulated, financed and controlled by the State, through co-operation agreements.

The recognition of the growing role played by these organisations in the provision of social support is not without criticisms. There has been an ongoing debate on the type of protagonism to be assumed by the NGO’s in their relationship with the State, namely as far as these institutions could be, on the one hand, acting as a “cushion” between the pressures over the State from the civil society and at the same time, by depending largely on voluntary work, and on the other hand, they release the State from a significant part of the financial burden of financing social support (Sousa Santos and Hespanha, 1995).

Others argue (Capucha, 1995) that the State should deepen its social responsibilities, which, among other, means that it should promote a stronger involvement of NGO’s but also demand stronger responsibilities from NGO’s and other social partners in the definition, implementation and evaluation of social policies. The quality of the service provision should be a major goal in this strategy as well as a the promotion of a strategic convergence between the State and the NGO’s services provided, where the former should assume the role of quality and innovation model.
Some of the significant changes that occurred in the late 90’s in the field of social policies opened up the field for a renewal of this relationship between the State and the NGO’s in the field of social action.

**From social assistance to social action?**

The so-called “new generation” of social policies implemented in Portugal after 1996 brought about a new concept of social action based on the idea of promotion and aiming at generating and supporting ways of developing each citizen and making them independent. This new concept tries to break the traditional notion of social assistance in its negative sense of paternalistic and partial support that characterised many of the intervention models promoted by private solidarity institutions and other NGO’s in this domain.

The evolution towards the consolidation of the non-suppletive character of the State’s social action had clearly began in 1984 when Social Action became part of the Social Security System. However, only in the late 1990’s, particularly with the implementation of the Guaranteed Minimum Income (now the Social Insertion Income) would there be a more obvious improvement in this evolution towards social active policies.

“Active social policies, seeking to act on the causes of problems and seeking to create conditions for transforming the environment and individual attitudes, represent support for the actions referred to and the condition for sustaining them.

This diversified range of measures and programmes with such varied spheres of action has certain basic principles in common that provide consistency and coherence.

It should first be pointed out that they promote a concept of citizenship that can be extended to all individuals and that embodies the right to work and the right to a minimum income, but also the full exercise of civil rights, culture, education and participation in social life in general by the integration communities, from the family to the most varied social groups, in short, full integration into life in society.

Secondly, they are all based on recognition of the importance of equality of opportunities as a way of combating inequalities and social fragmentation (...).

Finally they all adopt an approach of mobilising and making society as a whole and each citizen responsible in the effort to eradicate poverty and exclusion. This approach is reflected in the involvement of the most varied bodies, such as state services, the local authorities, non-profit-making organisations and simple groups of citizens in partnership and working in networks, which increasingly represents a pooling of efforts and wills, in association with an extended sharing of responsibilities”.


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This extended sharing of responsibilities and growing participation of different social partners is also one of the goals of the Social and Economic Council – created in 1991 – where according to the Constitution should be present “Government representatives, organisations representing workers, economic activities and families as well as those representing the autonomic regions and local authorities”.

More recently, in 1996, the Co-operation Agreement on Welfare was implemented in order to create the conditions for developing a co-operation strategy between private welfare institutions (IPSS), the central state and the local administration. This agreement recognises the role of these NGO’s and simultaneously seek to reinforce their co-ordination and partnership with the various state bodies.

Also in 1997, the creation of the so-called Social Networks (Redes Sociais) aimed at producing a major impact on the role of municipalities in the definition and implementation of social policies. In fact, municipalities have also been playing a growing role at the level of social policies and in the relationship with the State and with Social Solidarity ONG’s. The implementation in the late 1990’s of the Special Rehousing Programme in the major metropolitan areas, aiming at the eradication of shanty towns, is one of the examples of this local reinforced involvement. The Social Networks – still being implemented – are a range of different forms of mutual support and of private non-profit making and public agencies that work in the field of social action and which co-ordinate their activities among themselves and with the Government with a view of eradicating or attenuating poverty and social exclusion and promoting social development.

If the reinforcement of networks and partnerships have acted as key changes in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the creation of the Guaranteed Minimum Income (implemented in 1997) was essential in this evolution towards social action based on promotion and on the recognition of social rights. The introduction of the GMI was a true challenge in the sense that it demanded a co-responsibility from the individuals, the institutions and the society as a whole in the implementation of a set of intervention measures requiring the participation of all, through which every actor assumes certain co-operation commitments, essential for the definition of an insertion process. Although in the past there have been experiences in the domain of social action where this model had occasionally and informally been implemented, the creation at a national level of such an instrument – the GMI – launched a totally new challenge to the society as a whole, compromising both the citizen and the society, by establishing a “contract” in which right and duty are placed side by side.

In spite of this favourable policy context in the late 1990’s, the fact that Portugal has not the experience of a consolidated and deep-rooted Welfare State has proved to be a major drawback for the continuity of social action trends whenever there are major political shifts.

Recent ideological changes in the Portuguese political context – since the election of the centre-right coalition at the end of 2001 – are in clear contradiction with some of the evolution presented above, reinforced by a conjunctural adverse economic situation.

If the introduction of new policies, such as the ones described above, which would necessarily have a strong impact on the organisations, their working methodologies and even working philosophies would not be an easy task, the emergence of a non-favourable political context can prove to be dramatic.
It is true that some dynamics have been created at a local level and they will perdure. The increase of the networking capacity at a local level is obvious in spite of the difficulties still existing as well as the acknowledgment of the need to improve the professional skills of the social workers and other technical staff working in NGO’s and the concern with the training of volunteer staff. This expanding involvement at the community level has allowed the identification of resources and the establishment of participatory mechanisms. At the same time, the growing level of demand and a higher conscience of one’s rights regarding social action will necessarily push the quality of the service provision.

However, on the other hand, several drawbacks can already be identified: the strictly economic perspective that is growing stronger, the unemployment rise, the flexibilisation of working conditions, the complexity of social exclusion processes and the emergence of new dimensions of social exclusion, the prevalence of deep-rooted convictions regarding the purpose of social assistance in its more paternalistic and therapeutic model, the effects of budget constraints, a weak mobilisation of civil society, the consistent lack of serious evaluation on the work developed by social solidarity institutions, the overcharge on the professionals as far as emergency situations are concerned preventing longer term strategies, and a stronger emphasis on the identification of “abusers” regarding the entitlement to social rights, promoting discriminatory attitudes and increasing social stigma.

In the domain of homelessness, it had already been possible to identify some obstacles to the potential created by the favourable policy context emerged in the late 1990’s.

As far as the GMI is concerned there is a wide recognition that it is only marginally benefiting the homeless, although there is no official explanation for this under-representation. However, claiming the GMI implies a certain number of administrative procedures which can be difficult for people in extreme marginalisation processes, without the necessary assistance or guidance. The lack of co-ordination between different social services - those directly working with the homeless and those involved in the implementation of social policy measures - seems to be one of the reasons underlying this low number of homeless among GMI claimants. On the other hand, the fact that the daily work of the professionals in specific services for homeless is mainly oriented towards the daily management of the facilities (shelters, social support centres and so on), makes it difficult for these professionals to understand the different pathways and needs of these individuals and develop effective and continued insertion processes. Finally, the lack of sensibility towards the characteristics of this population, namely as regards the demand for an active availability for work or for integration in professional training when their personal situation is very often incompatible with such a compromise before other type of psychological and social intervention is complete.

On the other hand, the increased effort in the co-ordination of social action between different actors through the implementation of specific instruments (as stated before) seems to be involving only marginally those institutions directly working with the homeless. Their participation in these networks and structures seems to be irregular and never seems to assume a relevant role, contrary to other organisations in areas such as employment, training or education. Homelessness remains marginal to these most recent key drivers of change.

As far as housing is concerned in spite of the growth of public social housing and the direct involvement of local authorities in major re-housing initiatives since mid-90's
there has been no co-ordination between the social action initiatives addressed at the homeless population at a local level and the provision of housing. Social housing and homeless are dealt with by different sectors and there has been no linkage between them. Supported housing is almost non-existent and temporary/emergency accommodation tends to become permanent “housing solutions” for the homeless population.

In this sense, the major effects of the most recent changes in political orientations and guidance regarding this specific area it is possible to identify a restriction of State support to some organisations, a concern with the rentabilisation of resources together with the emergence of media coverage of initiatives that clearly focus on the emergency side of intervention and on “cleaning-up” strategies.

The path leading from social assistance to social action is indeed a difficult one. Objective and subjective obstacles can be found along this way and here too the achievements can be small and discouraging ... but always worthy.

From trends to reality: the nature of service provision

In spite of the growing recognition, public visibility and protagonism assumed by the NGO’s in the field of social intervention there is still an outstanding lack of systematic knowledge on the work they are developing, namely as far as intervention methodologies and evaluation procedures are concerned.

The fact that most service provision oriented towards homeless population is carried out by private non-profit organisations and given the scarcity of information on specific data concerning service provision for homeless people, the next paragraphs will focus on the data collected from the only available research (Capucha, coord., 1995) produced on Social Solidarity NGO’s among which one can find those specifically addressing the homeless population.

As far as service provision is concerned the authors group the different types of service provision into four models of intervention types: “traditional equipment and services”, “risk groups”, “non-traditional equipments and services” and “preventive actions”. Over 75% of the 800 institutions enquired have been classified under the first type.

Contrary to “risk groups” (where some of the homeless specific services have been included), the dominant category (“traditional equipment and services”) is geographically dispersed. The former type of intervention model is mainly to be found in the major urban areas. On the other hand, there seems to be a close relationship between older institutions (misericórdias) and a traditional types of intervention and a stronger presence of more recent NGO’s – usually non-confessional associations or enterprises – and the other type of intervention. Linked to the type of intervention is also the dimension of these structures which once again seem to introduce some clear trends within the universe of these social solidarity organisations: smaller size institutions have clearly increased their number after 1974, at the same time as larger institutions had their peak before the beginning of the XX century and until the Revolution.

In terms of service provision it can be said that most NGO’s are oriented towards the provision of traditional services to specific groups of clients (e.g. kindergartens, day centres, residential homes for the elderly), although there is a clear trend, in most recent years, and in the context of the emergence of new types of NGO’s, to address
more complex situations and publics (e.g. drug addicts, mental handicapped people, homeless, prostitutes, young people at risk).

In the field of the fight against homelessness the role of these institutions has been traditionally oriented towards the provision of basic services, namely temporary shelter, food and personal hygiene. There has been a lack of prevention strategies as well as the prevalence of institutions working with “consolidated” situations of homelessness, focussing on the provision of “what is possible in such extreme cases”.

However, in this specific domain it is also possible to identify different types of institutions: from long established institutions in the field of social action, such as the Santa Casa da Misericórdia de Lisboa to other more recent organisations such as AMI (the only institution whose services are scattered throughout the country) or other more specifically oriented services in the field of health (ARIA and Médicos do Mundo).

The religious or non-religious motivation is also to be found among the institutions working with the homeless as well as a growing role of municipalities in the fight against homelessness.

In a context of institutional diversity where various institutions, private organisations and public agencies deal with different aspects of the vulnerabilities that affect homeless people it is nevertheless interesting to find a more or less common pattern of service provision.

Thus, one can find a wide range of services providing the satisfaction of basic needs (food, clothes, personal hygiene, basic medical care); those providing temporary shelter and other support (social and psychological support, medical support); and those targeting at other kind of supports (mental health and temporary lodging, occupational and professional training, community life).

Most of the services providing temporary shelter and the satisfaction of basic needs (meals, showers, clothes, etc.) have long been established although some of them have recently undergone some major changes in order to be able to give a more overall and integrated response to the needs of the users.

Some of the shelters available in major urban centres such as Lisbon and Oporto – now in the process of undergoing important changes in terms of their specialisation in specific areas (e.g. drug addicts, immigrants) have been providing basic services (temporary accommodation, food, clothes, personal hygiene), and also medical support, counselling (social and legal) and information services, professional training and job orientation.

The evolution in the provision of services in this specific domain has mainly been centered around the increase in the number of service providers and therefore in the number of basic services available which has been trying to respond to a growth of demand both from the homeless themselves but also from other institutions and other services.

The creation, in September 2001, of the Social Emergency National Line following one of NAP’s targets is one of the services referred to by the institutions working in this field. The requests received by the Line referring to homeless situations are directed either to Emergency District Teams located in all the districts and in most cases to the other institutions or services with specific intervention in this field.
Some priorities in the intervention strategies developed by service provision for the homeless have been identified. These priorities range from the need to promote a better accessibility to services, with a special emphasis on housing solutions (e.g. protected housing), to a better physical and technical resourcing, or to the need to sensitize both the institutions and the civil society to the problem of homelessness. The need to reinforce networking and multi-agency work as well as a specific attention to be given to specific needs such as mental health is once again one of the main concerns and one of the main priorities identified by professionals in this field.

The problems related with co-ordination belong basically to three different areas: policy, institutional organisation and networking, and resources (Bruto da Costa and Baptista, 2000). Although the importance of partnership is increasingly being recognised in Portugal, actual practice has to make progress on the way towards a coherent and co-ordinated co-operation between the interested institutions. Until now, no co-ordination strategy (at a local or national level) as emerged in order to frame the work developed by the multiple institutions working on the field and the situation remains one of superposition of responses and even competition between organisations. At the same time, important gaps remain in areas such as transition from temporary to more permanent housing solutions, support services to women and families, access to health care and not to basic health care, and services evaluation.

On the whole, the provision of services for homeless people in Portugal is still a long way from a global comprehensive strategy – involving different actors at different levels – that might incorporate, orient and monitor the service provision for the homeless. Together with the lack of resources and with multiple organisational difficulties, individual (political or not) protagonism and competition have until now inhibited the development of a consistent and continued effectiveness of service provision.

**Regulation and funding**

State dependency could be the label to define the funding pattern of most social solidarity NGO’s, among which the service providers for the homeless population are included.

However, the funding of third sector organisations has to be understood under the light of other organisational elements which may enrich the analysis, namely as far as issues of regulation are concerned.

The universe of social solidarity NGO’s in general is still characterised by the strong protagonism of their leaderships. One of the most interesting conclusions of the research referred to above (Capucha, coord., 1995) concerns the organisational models that characterise these institutions.

These institutions are usually presided over by individuals with a strong personal authority and protagonism, whose leadership is usually extended over the time. The very low level of turn over among the President of the Board of Directors is one of the indicators for this stability and strong protagonism. This feature is to be found both in the oldest and in the newer organisations.

These individuals, among whom one finds a strong presence of the clergy, usually come from the upper social classes and present high levels of school attainment which not only reinforces their leadership but also facilitates the requirements for voluntary service which usually characterises their work in the institution.
This dependency upon the “leader” is also confirmed by the fact that in most organisations the Direction is elected either following a process of single list, or by the direct designation of personalities then confirmed by electoral procedures.

The role of the President assumes a major importance not only inside the institution, in the decision making processes (concerning personnel hiring, patrimonial assets, organisational strategies), but also in the relationship with the outside world.

The question of financing is precisely one of the areas in which the President usually has a dominant and decisive role. In fact, in the actual proficiency of the President in accessing financing sources lies, in many cases, one of the main reasons for these long-term mandates.

The relationship with the State – the main financial supporter of most activities developed within the institutional context – is a vital component of the organisation and functioning of social solidarity organisations.

The channelling of funds towards the activities is usually made through the Social Security system. Most of these NGO's have a specific status – the so-called Private Institutions of Social Solidarity (IPSS). Created as non-profit making organisations they are recognised by the State through a record in a specific department within the Social Action. Their public utility recognition being granted, they automatically have access to a range of benefits, namely fiscal benefits.

Apart from these benefits their activities are directly supported through the establishment of agreements with the Regional Centres for Social Security, under the scope of social action.

The municipalities can also be an important source of funding for many of these organisations, although mostly for occasional actions. In the relationship with the local authorities it should be stressed that political shifts at a local level can make a big difference in the channelling of resources to different organisations.

"To the strong presence of social initiatives linked to the Catholic Church has, in latest years, been added the creation of other initiatives of citizens in the field of social provision (namely the co-operative movement and parents’ associations). One might say that, in spite of the overall contribution of these initiatives (namely in number and diversity of activities), their existence is strongly rooted in the state support, a circumstance that may rise questionings on their real autonomy and on the identity of "other" interests." (Rodrigues and Stoer, 1998: 96)

In these multiple relationships – both at a local, a regional or a national level – the protagonism of the organisation’s leadership becomes vital and it may become clearer now why territorial areas with a high concentration of services, namely in the area of homelessness, competition between services can be a major drawback to the urgent need for a strong networking and multi-agency strategy.

Other less relevant sources of financing have also been identified: private donations and sponsorships, including resources in kind, legacies, own income, public-raising campaigns and EU co-funding for specific projects and activities. In some areas the contribution of the users is also an additional source of funding.

In the specific case of the service provision for homeless population, the State (both at a central and at a local level) is the main funding source of the organisations and here too, the strong protagonism of the organisations’ leader is a vital resource for obtaining
funds, particularly in an area where the beneficiaries are in such an extreme marginalisation process that they hardly become a target for any sponsorship. The possibility for them to make a substantial contribution as service users is also very limited.

These additional difficulties may explain some of the major reasons for present dissatisfaction referred to by service providers in this specific area in accessing financial resources: recent constraints in the financial support received, bureaucratic obstacles linked to the lack of sensibility of public entities to the specificity of the population, very scattered financing and the lack of co-ordination in the granting of subsidies to different organisations in the same area.

Thus, internal institutional organisation and networking basically relies on personal relationships at different levels. The importance and effectiveness of these contacts can be extremely useful in some cases, since they prove themselves vital to the everyday life of the services and their users. What can be questioned is the actual scope of such a practice, having in mind that the ultimate aim of social support services is not the management of poverty and social exclusion but the eradication and prevention of such situations. Co-ordination should be more than the result of individual action. Co-operation at the institutional level would certainly have a positive impact on the use of the available resources, the assessment of the homeless needs and the definition of strategies to cope with their situations.

The lack of evaluation of the service provided both at an internal level and also externally, although not referred, is certainly one of the most urgent needs in order to improve the quality of service provision and the adequacy of the resources used and the needs expressed by the homeless themselves.

In the case of internal ongoing evaluation the consequences of its lack have direct effects on the professional work developed, namely in the motivation of the professionals, in the relationship with the users and in the quality of the service provided.

In the case of the lack of external evaluation on the services by the financing authorities other consequences can be identified, namely in the waste of resources which are not being used appropriately, the lack of knowledge on intervention priorities, the impossibility to design integrated strategies to combat homelessness and the scattering of resources with doubtful criteria, promoting competition and lack of responsibility towards the users and the society in general.

If most of the funding, as we have seen, comes mostly from the State there seems to be a curious relationship between the institutional perception on the role of the state as a source of finance and its role in the definition and implementation of social policies, namely those addressing the more disadvantaged population.

Resorting once again to the study on social solidarity NGO's (Capucha, coord., 1995) the first interesting result is that the majority of the 800 institutions inquired is mainly financed by the State, a financing which is largely considered to be insufficient in order for them "to develop our work as we would like to".

On the other hand, the demand for a reinforcement of the State's financing (referred by over 60% of the institutions) is stronger among medium sized organisations. If in the case of very big organisations, long established in Portugal, and usually from a catholic origin, have stronger possibilities to diversify their financing sources, the same kind of reasons will certainly not apply to small sized organisations (with less than 5 workers)
which are more willing to look for other sources of financing as an alternative/complement to the State's funding reinforcement.

These smaller organisations, most of them created in the 1980's and 1990's, have on the one hand "started their activity at a time when the State's difficulties become more evident, as far as the support given to social action is concerned and also when there is a discourse valuating the virtues of private initiatives, contrasting with the eventual inefficiency of the public sector, according to some, or in complementarity, in the opinion of others." (Capucha, ibidem: 144).

On the other hand it should be stressed that the protagonism of smaller institutions and their lobbying capacity in terms of fund-raising namely near the state is certainly more limited than other more influent organisations and thus, looking for funding alternatives is a matter of survival.

Financed by the State and demanding the reinforcement of financial resources NGO's do not necessarily recognise the State as a real partner in the conception and development of social action activities. In fact, the NGO's inquired believe that they are better prepared than the State to define and execute social policies (three in every four) and this can only be achieved by the reinforcement of public financing. Another position, less predominant is the one that advocates more autonomy for the institutions at both levels (financial and policy making). A minority among the institutions inquired believe it is the State's responsibility to define social policies for which the financial resources are essential.

However, when asked about the State's, the civil society's and the institutions' themselves for their responsibilities regarding the integration of the more disadvantaged population, there is a massive attribution of responsibilities on the State from the NGO's inquired.

If the State has certainly contributed to this type of institutional perceptions it is time that new relationships between the State and social solidarity organisations can be strengthen on the basis of co-responsibility and professionalism: "There is a tendency today to naturally recognise the advantages of partnership, and even admitting its potential, partnerships have to be questioned regarding the reasons for their opportunity, pre-conditions for implementation and objectives". (Rodrigues and Stoer, 1998: 100)

Conclusions

In this paper we focused on the nature of service provision for homeless and on its component of regulation and funding, under the broader context of the activities developed by NGO's and its relationship with the State, an analysis which has necessarily been limited by the scarcity of more specific information available.

The complex relationship between service provision of social services for the more disadvantaged population, namely the homeless, has been discussed in the context of the dynamics of NGO's in the field in the last decades.

It has been argued that the philosophies underlying the so-called active social policies had a real potential as key drivers of change in the provision of social services under a new concept of social action. Some of this potential has been translated into consolidated experiences and will eventually be marginally affected by the emerging ideologies brought about by the most recent political shift in the Portuguese society. In
the specific field of homeless service provision it has been argued that this potential has never been an actual benefit.

The increased protagonism of NGO's in the provision of social services has not yet been accompanied by substantial changes in the pattern of intervention models: traditionalism seems to be predominant namely regarding the more vulnerable target groups such as the homeless population where the emergency side of intervention is still the most apparent.

Finally, we have discussed regulation and funding issues, namely the predominant role of the State as the main funding source for social action activities in all areas, and particularly for homelessness services. A position that is not accompanied by the NGO's recognition of the State as an actual partner which derives both from a desire among the former for more protagonism and autonomy but also from the incomplete achievement of the State's duties as a real model in the management and evaluation of funding resources.

References


